



MEPs combat killer fake medicines

- Internet sales a real concern
- Some MEPs want EU norms applied outside Europe

Viagra, cancer drugs, anti-malaria pills and painkillers - more and more people buy medicine on the internet, but it's often counterfeit. MEPs on the Parliament Committee responsible for health recently voted in favour of new mandatory safety rules for medicine in general, including internet sales, to reduce the number of fake medicines in the European Union.

In November and December 2008 customs officials seized more than 34 million illegal pills across the EU. Faking medicines is high-profit, low risk crime and it is not sufficiently regulated at European level.

Control over packaging, internet sales

On 27 April, MEPs voted for the introduction of mandatory safety features for certain medicines, such as seals or serial numbers for packaging (a lot of fake medicine is getting into the legal supply chain during repackaging).

The MEPs also want to add to the European Commission's proposals regulating the sale of pharmaceuticals via the internet. Not all countries allow it but if they do, the sellers have to obtain a special authorisation, carry an EU logo, list on a European database, and link to a central website at government level.

Speaking in a press conference on 27 April, Parliament's rapporteur Marisa Matias (GUE/NGL) said, "counterfeit medicines are a form of pharmaceutical crime - criminal networks easily overcome the national borders. I think that the absence of legislation encourages counterfeiters today. Falsified medicines are silent killers because they can seriously harm patients."

"Not ambitious enough"

French MEP Françoise Grossetête of the centre right EPP group said, "I regret that the regime is not as tough on drugs as for food. For example, we authorise the repackaging of medicine but they can't repackage a package of pasta."

German Socialist Dagmar Roth-Behrendt said, "It is a good result but it is not ambitious enough. I must say I believe one of the biggest parts is to control the Internet. I am afraid I believe that we will very soon face the hugest amount of falsified counterfeiting products and ingredients coming into the EU. Are we willing to put that into action as well towards third countries with which we have Trade Agreements as China?"

The report is part of the pharmacy package (pharmacovigilance and prescription medicines) and is to be voted by the whole Chamber in June.